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**ALLARGAMENTO DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA  
E GRANDI OPERE INFRASTRUTTURALI IN BIELORUSSIA**

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to have the honour to participate in the work of the International Conference “Le grandi opere infrastrutturali, il territorio e lo sviluppo sostenibile” and to share with the distinguished participants of this conference some views concerning the consequences of the enlargement of the European Union for the Eastern European countries in general and for their infrastructure in particular. I would like to express my gratitude for the invitation to take part in this important meeting and my special thanks go to the Center of Transport Studies of the University of Messina and its director professor E. Fanara for the perfect organization of this event and warm hospitality.

For last years we have been witnessing very dramatic and significant events which have completely changed the European continent and paved the way for the new prospects for the future of all the nations of Europe. This process got started with the fall of the Berlin wall and the unification of Germany, followed by the proclamation of independence by the three Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. And then two more historic events took place on the same day – December 8, 1991. On one side, leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus signed the agreement on the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and on the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which would comprise 12 former Soviet republics. On the other side, the heads of

states or governments of the 12 Member-States of the European Communities approved in Maastricht a text of the Treaty on the European Union. This ambitious legal document was a starting point for the successful development of this new entity with, what it turned out to be, a very dynamic enlargement process, which in the nearest future could bring the membership of the European Union up to 27 countries on the basis of the provision of the Amsterdam and Nice Treaties. And there are expectations that this is not a limit.

This could be seen from the results of the European Convention on the Future of Europe, which finalized its work in June 2003 with the adoption of the unprecedented legal text – draft Constitution for Europe. It seems to me that the Convention really succeeded in achieving its three main objectives – namely, to bring the citizens closer to the European institutions and European design, to provide conditions for the European political area in the enlarged European Union, to turn the EU into a stabilizing factor to serve as a model for a new world development. It is quite logical that the implementation of such large-scale and far-reaching tasks would require a lot of efforts from all the participants of the integration process – the EU Member-States, its institutions, the European public in general. It would be justified to assume that in a strive to find solutions for these challenges – and the main one here is to absorb new member-states without losing the dynamics of the economic integration and social cohesion – the European Union may become egocentric.

In the Eastern part of Europe we strongly believe that such egocentrism should and would be accompanied by the growing understanding that the EU enlargement demands a new level of cooperation with its neighbours to the East. There is no need to argue with the well-known German expert H. Timmerman, who said, “with the presence in Europe of economically undeveloped countries it would be impossible to built a European economic area”. In other words, the problems of the countries in transition should be considered as the problems of the European integration.

You won’t be surprised to hear that the Eastern European countries, staying formally outside of the EU enlargement process,

nevertheless have to face its consequences in many areas of their activities – economy, trade, movements of persons, cross-border problems, etc. Thus, for the Republic of Belarus the share of the enlarged EU in the foreign trade balance would increase next year 2 times, because 3 acceding states (Poland, Lithuania and Latvia) at the moment account for 25% of the Belarusian foreign trade outside of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The EU enlargement would inevitably affect many aspects of the economic relations of Belarus with these neighbouring countries. For example, we expect that after the entry to the EU of Lithuania and Latvia there would be significant changes in the conditions of access of the Belarusian goods to the ports of Klaipeda and Ventspils at the Baltic Sea. For Belarus as a land-locked country this is a question of crucial importance because we largely depend on these ports to export yearly about 1 million tons of our chemical and other products. Of course, there are many other areas in the Eastern Europe, which would be affected by the EU enlargement. But I don't think I should at this stage go into more details because it looks more or less evident.

That is why we sincerely welcome the initiative of some EU Member-States to grant a new “neighbour status” to Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. We were pleased to learn that this initiative received support from the EU institutions, which offered recently a basic platform to integrate the Eastern dimension of its policies with the Barcelona process. It was embodied in the document entitled “Wider Europe neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with the Eastern and Southern neighbours” (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia and 10 Southern Mediterranean countries).

I strongly believe that it is very important at this point to fill the platform with specific, meaningful and practical provisions. Many would see a big potential in the idea to propose to Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova prospects for concluding the so-called “European” agreements aimed at granting the association membership to these countries. Such an opportunity could serve as an important and efficient stimulus to promote democratic and economic

reforms that would result in the expansion in our continent of an area of security, sustainable development and prosperity.

With a view for such prospects we realize that there is much to be learnt from the EU Member-States as well as there is much that the European Union could offer to implement for its Eastern neighbours in order to facilitate their transition to a democracy and market economy. This is absolutely true practically for all the spheres of our activities starting from the development of the economic ties and foreign trade, the support for the small and medium enterprises, the trans-border cooperation and going to the mass media sector, human contacts, non-governmental organizations which should provide the basis for the strengthening of the civil society in our countries.

In this context I could not fail to give you a vivid example of how this task may be accomplished. I refer to the project “Learning from the EU: support for a more democratic constitutional and legislative reforms through education and public awareness activities”, which is now being realized by the joint efforts of the Association of the European Studies of Belarus and the Italian non-governmental organization ISMERFO, headed by the distinguished professor E. Fanara. The project is financed by the European Union within the framework of the TACIS Civil Society Programme for Belarus with the co-financing share of the AES Belarus and ISMERFO. It provides for a splendid opportunity to bring the expertise of the leading professors and politicians of the EU Member-States for the Belarusian public in general and for the intellectual elite in particular. We have already held two rounds of seminars in Minsk and Gomel, where the information presented by the EU experts was very warmly received by the local audience and even gave rise for further initiatives that might be developed in the nearest future. I am very pleased to recognize among the participants of this international conference the EU Ambassador Mr. N. Justen and professor of the Rome University “La Sapienza” Mr. C. Imbriani, whose presence in Belarus had greatly contributed to the success of the above-mentioned activities.

To my mind, this example proves the fact that the European Union and its Member-States are able to find the instruments and procedures to stimulate changes for the better in their neighbouring countries. This is of special relevance to the infrastructure networks, which need to be developed in the Eastern Europe. As you may know, in Belarus there are two important trans-European corridors, the role of which could not be overestimated for the traffic of goods between the Western and Eastern Europe. You have just heard the figures saying that about 50% of goods to and from Russia pass through Belarus along the corridor number 2, which is the shortest and most convenient way to the East.

And here I would like to support the point made this morning by the representative of the European Commission Mr. F. Morales who urged to pay priority attention to finding the solutions for the cross-border problems and promote the efficient cooperation of the interested parties. After the enlargement the European Union and Belarus would have 1000km-long border which is very likely to become the front line in the fight against organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal migration. At the same time we deem it important to ensure that for Belarus and its citizens this border should serve rather as a bridge, than as a new “iron” wall.

For the moment the cross-border infrastructure of the corridor number 2 leaves much to be desired and might be characterized as the “bottle neck”, because it takes not hours but days for the cargo carriers to have their goods moved through the border. Unfortunately, the same characteristic could soon be applied to the movement of persons, which might be seriously hindered by the new procedures for crossing the borders of the acceding countries. Starting from the beginning of October 2003, Poland will introduce the visa regime for Belarus, that technically would mean the necessity to provide Polish visas for about 4 million persons that yearly come to Poland from Belarus, whereas worldwide the consular service of Poland issues normally only 250 000 visas per year. I believe these figures speak for themselves.

In any case, I am confident that Belarus will not remain the black hole on the photos of Europe taken from the outer space. The

public consciousness in the country is gradually growing as pro-European. The social surveys show that more than 50% of the respondents support the idea of the development of a full-scaled cooperation with the European Union. But still the formation of the European identity is not a consistent and easy-going process.

Nevertheless, I would like to state that the people of Belarus stand for the active economic partnership with the European Union aimed at ensuring the sustainable development, for the enriched political dialogue, for the effective cooperation in the sphere of home and justice affairs, approximation of the legislation, for the increased cooperation to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl tragedy. Recently the government of Belarus embodied this position in the document that says: "Belarus welcomes the elaboration of a new concept of enhanced partnership between the enlarged EU and adjacent Eastern European countries, supports the involvement of all interested countries and institutions in the discussion. The collective search for solutions that would meet objectives of all parties concerned in an optimum way is an essential prerequisite for genuinely democratic neighbourly relations based on mutual rapprochement and respect for concerns of both sides."

With this optimistic expectations I would like to conclude my statement and thank you for the attention.

**LUCIO BIANCO**

*(c.s.)*

Ringrazio tutti i relatori e dichiaro conclusi i lavori di questa mattinata. L'appuntamento è per domani, per la seconda giornata.

